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DMV partnership generates many career opportunities



Richard Miller, an SCVRD client who is currently participating in the SWAT program at the SCDMV.

"I came into this program as an individual lost in the employment world," says Richard Miller. "I'd had two careers in my life. I was employed by the Mental Health Department for 10 years and then I was a truck driver for twenty something years. So when I couldn't drive a truck any more because of my disability, I was kind of lost in the world and didn't know what direction to take."

Richard is a client with the Vocational Rehabilitation Department and the program he is referring to is the Skilled Workforce Apprenticeship Training (SWAT) Program.

In the SWAT program, clients are matched to an employer's position and needs. They participate in a structured, on-the-job training period during which they learn all aspects of a job, including knowledge, skills and company culture.

Through the SWAT program and VR's partnership with the South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), Richard has returned to the workforce.

"I'm learning to work with people to bring out skills that I didn't know I have," he says.

Richard is one of 79 individuals who have participated in the partnership with the DMV through the SWAT program or VetSuccess, a program for military veterans with disabilities promoted by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"These are amazing programs," says Kevin Shwedo, Executive Director of the DMV. "We're putting people to work who otherwise have not had the opportunity. It's a talented work pool, reflected by the amount of hirings that come out of both programs."

"We're putting South Carolinians back to work," says Stephen Marshall, SCVRD Business Development Specialist (BDS). "[The DMV is] putting them into careers where they can grow. These are career paths a lot of our trainees would not otherwise have had the opportunity to follow."

VR's partnership with the DMV began in June 2011 when Marshall and Darline Graham, from the SCVRD State Office, met with them to assess their needs and identify solutions VR could offer regarding their recruitment needs. The DMV was already utilizing VetSuccess and Marshall proposed following the same model with the SWAT program.

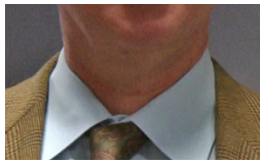


Kevin Shwedo, Executive Director of the SCDMV.



The first VR clients to participate worked in the DMV's Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Department. Due to a new federal mandate requiring all CDL records to be in a national database, there was a huge backlog of information that needed to be entered into DMV's computer system.

"I was so excited when Steve [Marshall] told me that the DMV was offering me an internship" says



*Stephen Marshall,
SCVRD Business
Development
Specialist.*

that the DMV was offering me an internship," says Angela Smith, CDL Compliance Specialist and former VR client. "[The DMV] asked me to come down that day. They asked me when I could start. I said that day. I didn't know what I was going to be doing, but I was ready to hit the floor running. I was just ready to show myself as a great worker and an asset."

Sherri Plair, CDL Compliance Specialist, also started at that same time, with SCVRD assistance. There were "ten file cabinets full" of records they had to sort through.

"Sherri and I had a competition," says Angela. "Each of us had a goal." Each day they challenged each other to see who could enter the most records. "The highest we got was about 415 each."



Sherri Plair, left, and Angela Smith, Commercial Drivers License Compliance Specialists at the South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles.

"They came in with an eagerness to work and willingness to learn," says Shirley Rivers, DMV Procedures and Compliance Deputy Director. We let them loose and they fit right in. They were instrumental in alleviating the backlog. Now they are permanent employees [with the CDL Help Desk], handling what comes in on a daily basis."

"We help commercial drivers all over the state of South Carolina," says Angela, with pride. "We get yelled at, we get loved on, we get the job done!" She and Sherri both laugh. And they continue to challenge each other.

"They set the foundation and opened the door for additional clients," adds Marshall. "We expanded the partnership to [include DMV's] field branches. I serve as coordinator with my fellow BDS's recruiting and matching clients for the program."

Brian Washington participated in the VetSuccess program after 27 years in the military and it provided "an outstanding transition from the military into the civilian sector."

Through VetSuccess he was hired at the DMV, where he is now an Employment and Recruiting Specialist.

"When I came in, I didn't know what to expect, but I can say from day one you are given responsibility, you are considered a full time employee. And that felt really good. I had other job opportunities [offered to me] under the program, but for me it was about where you are happy. And the DMV put me in an environment that I want to be a part of."



The success of both programs results from commitment, according to Melinda Woodhurst, DMV Director for Administration. "It's a commitment on [DMV's] side that says I'm going to find this individual a fit, I'm committed to getting this person employed. And VR's commitment is equal to and as energetic as ours."

And it's a commitment from each individual who participates. "Through this program we find individuals that we normally wouldn't find. They



*Melinda Woodhurst,
Director for
Administration at
SCDMV.*

individuals that we normally wouldn't find. They came in and said, 'I want to be part of your team, I want to offer my skills to make your organization better,'" says Woodhurst. "That made me more committed to each individual."

Woodhurst is also enthusiastic with VR's proactive approach, contacting them with lists of clients with skills that match potential job positions at DMV, as well as how responsive VR is when the DMV calls looking for candidates with certain skills. She also points out that clients who participate in the program may be hired for jobs other than the one they are specifically trained for due to their skills, initiative and work ethic.

"We've had individuals come on board who were so impressive that as soon as a vacancy was available we converted them to a full-time hire," she says. "We didn't wait for the [training] program to conclude."

"They come in, they want to work, and they give us 100 percent," adds Shwedo. "We get some amazing people. We put them into the workforce and we benefit. And they stay because they like it here and we love what they do."

Shwedo also encourages and challenges other agencies and businesses to participate in both VR's SWAT program and the VetSuccess program. "We're beneficiaries of both programs. [The programs] go side by side. They reduce the unemployment rate and increase the workforce. And at the end of the day, the critical piece is does a South Carolinian have a job? We can make that happen together."

Brian Washington agrees. "Whether VetSuccess or Voc Rehab, this is an opportunity for you. The programs parallel each other. People just want to come in and show they are able—they want to show their worth."

Richard Miller gives thanks to both VR and the DMV for "allowing me to find success."

He adds, with a smile, "I've always been a worker. I've always been a people person. I love to work. I like to be independent, and I like making money."

Around the state

Columbia DDS doctor receives Anti-Fraud Award

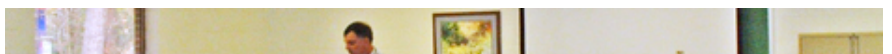
Dr. Rebecca Meriwether has been recognized by the Social Security Administration (SSA) Atlanta Region, receiving their Quarterly Anti-Fraud Award for her superior performance in detecting and reporting fraudulent activity in the disability claims process.

She referred a case to the Social Security's Continuing Disability Investigation (CDI) unit. The CDI investigation revealed that a claimant, who was allowed benefits for blindness, had an unrestricted driver's license. The investigator also obtained video evidence of the claimant shopping alone, reading a store flyer, and driving to and from the store.

Based on the investigation the claimant's benefits were ended and her current application was denied. The estimated savings to SSA are \$122,494.00.



Continuing education classes going strong in Horry/Georgetown





The Conway Area Office in collaboration with Horry Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) is providing quarterly classes in both customer service skills and food preparation/handling. The customer service training is being provided by the Kegler Group in cooperation with HGTC. The food handler certification class is taught by the HGTC culinary department using the National Restaurant Association certified Serve Safe program.

"The staff at HGTC have been very supportive of our efforts to make this happen," says David Edwards, Business Development Specialist for Horry and Georgetown counties. "Their training skills, cooperation and genuine desire to help our clients succeed are what make this partnership a success."

Photo: Chef Kipper Hillegass of HGTC covers proper handling of food items from storage to final preparation.

Leadership Economic Development Day in Laurens

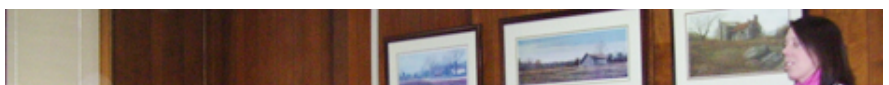


Stacie Smith, Laurens and Greenwood BDS (pictured far left), recently participated in Leadership Economic Development Day. As part of the program there was a tour of local business and public resources. The group enjoyed a tour of the Laurens Work Training Center conducted by Tim Gary, Work Training Center Manager.

Chad Ulmer, Laurens Area Office Supervisor, provided the group with an overview of SCVRD.

Good networking and interaction followed the tour and presentation.

Workshop prepares clients for Job Fair in Anderson





The Anderson office hosted a workshop on January 16 in preparation for their upcoming Job Fair on January 29.

Sheila Ford, Job Preparedness Instructor, planned the Interviewing, Appearance & Grooming Workshop, which included a guest speaker. Brandy Walters, Assistant Human Resources Director for the City of Anderson, spoke to the clients about first impressions, standard interview questions, and ways to help elevate yourself above other applicants. The workshop was also telecast to the Oconee-Pickens office, bringing the total number of clients in attendance to 16.

Did you know...

...that the public vocational rehabilitation program's creation was in large part due to the high number of veterans with disabling conditions returning from World War I?

President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Fess Act of 1920, also known as the Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act, designating state departments of education to administer the programs to provide guidance, training and job placement for people with physical disabilities.

South Carolina began accepting federal allotments for the VR program in 1927, when the state program began under the Department of Education. SCVRD became an independent state agency in 1957.



Events

Camden

- March 18 - **Job Fair in Camden.**
 - March - **Expungement** class.
- For more information, call 803-432-1068 or 866-206-5280*

Charleston

- February 20 - **Job Fair.** Job Preparedness Instructor Rhonda Cummings is preparing classes for Charleston's job ready clients. Charleston is ready to "Rally Together" to bring good job opportunities.
- For more information, call 843-740-1600*

Enabling eligible South Carolinians with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment

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